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# A GUIDE TO PAHARPUR

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by

M. A. A. Qadir



913.05

Pak/Gad

Department of Archaeology  
Ministry of Education & Information  
Government of Pakistan.



Published by the Department of Archaeology  
Ministry of Education & Information  
Government of Pakistan  
1963

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WEST BENGAL  
INDIA (BHARAT)

# EAST PAKISTAN

(SHOWING ANCIENT MONUMENTS)

Miles 10 20 30 40 50 60 Miles

Scale 1 inch to 15 Miles or 1: 1013,740.

ASSAM INDIA (BHARAT)

PAHARPUR

HAINAMATI

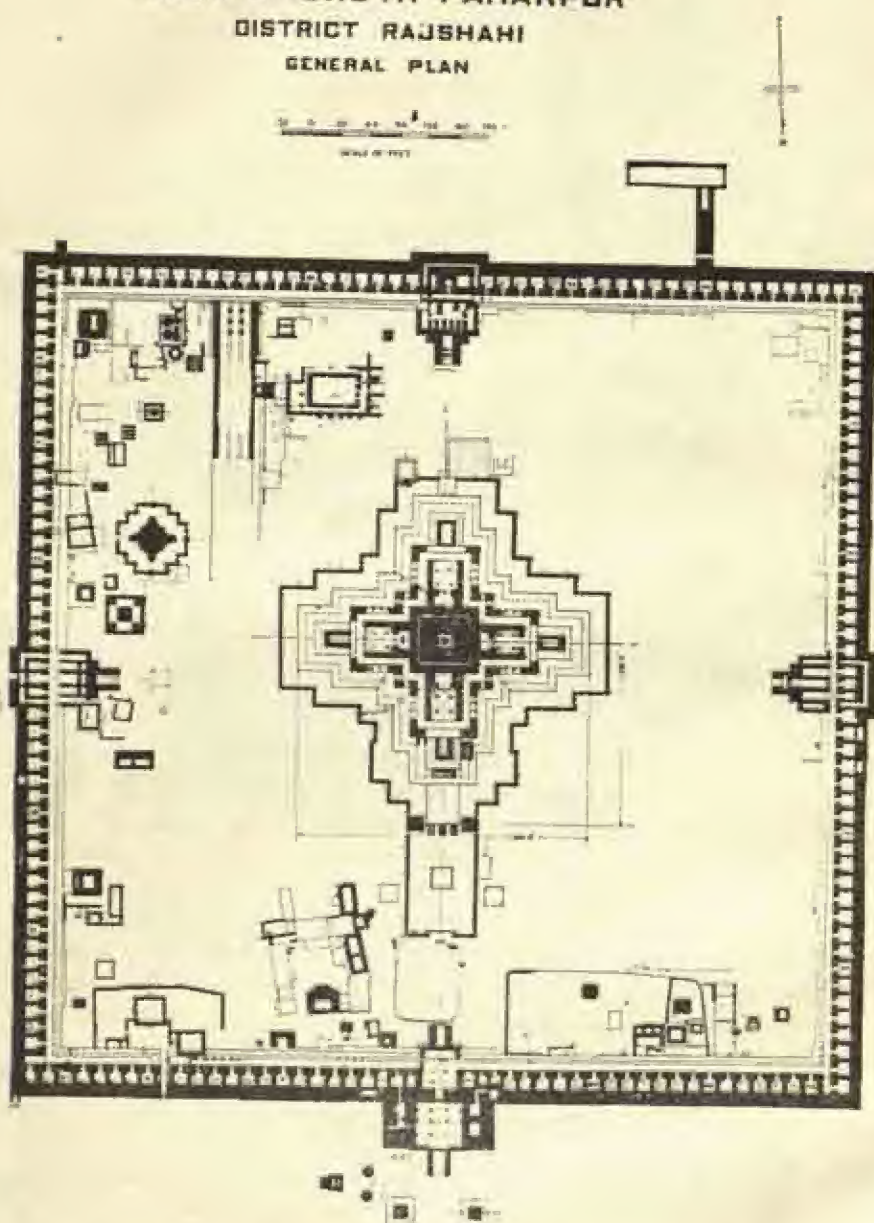
BURMA

WEST BENGAL  
INDIA (BHARAT)





EXCAVATIONS AT PAHARPUR  
DISTRICT RAJSHAHI  
GENERAL PLAN



2. General plan of the main monastery with temple in the centre.

## I. INTRODUCTION

About 3 miles west of Jamalganj, a station on the main line of the East Pakistan Railway, lies a small village named Paharpur where the remains of the largest known monastery south of the Himalaya were exposed. These ancient remains cover approximately an area of 81 bighas (27 acres) of land, and consist of many structures enclosed by a continuous line of walling, the central one is so big that it is locally known as pahar (hill). The present name is entirely due to the presence of the ruins of the lofty ancient temple, which must have dominated the landscape ever since it fell into desrepair, although it lies in the midst of the flat alluvial plain of Northern Bengal.

This famous site had long since attracted the attention of many eminent scholars and travellers. It was visited and described by Dr. Buchanan Hamilton as early as 1807-11, Westmacott in 1875 and Sir Alexandar Cunningham in 1875-80. The site remained a rendezvous of the treasure hunters for a long time. The discovery of an inscribed octagonal stone pillar near the south-



west corner of the enclosure led to the conclusion that the main mound covered the remains of a big Buddhist Stupa and was consequently declared to be a protected monument in 1919 under the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act.

Preliminary excavations of this site were undertaken by Professor D. R. Bhandarkar of the Calcutta University in the year 1923. The work was carried out only for a month. During this short period the operations were confined to the south-west corner of the large quadrangle which surrounds the main shrine. The work was next resumed by Mr. R. D. Banerjee in 1925-26, who started a V-shaped trench along the northern facade and exactly in the middle of the northern rampart of the enclosure. In that season, for the first time, the general outlines of the plan and scheme of decoration of the building were revealed. In addition to these the main stair-case and basement with terracotta plaques and the pillared hall, a mandapa with the circumambulating passage in front were also exposed during the same operation. With the exception of the seasons of 1930-31 and 1931-32, when Mr. G. C. Chandra carried out the excavation, the work at Paharpur was continued by Mr. K. N. Dikshit and by the year 1933-34 he was able to complete the work and exposed the whole mound including the monastery and Satyapir Bhita mound, which lies at a distance of 400 yards to the east of the main temple.

## II. HISTORY

About the political history of the ancient peoples of Bengal, Vedic literature gives no details save that it was peopled by a number of tribes with some kind of organised social and political life. It was Chandragupta who welded the major part of India into one empire and the authority of the great Mauryas was acknowledged in deltic as well as in northern Bengal. The fragmentary inscription discovered at Mahasthan proves conclusively that a provincial Governor had his seat at Mahasthan then known as Pundranagara, a prosperous city enjoying the blessing of good government. The discovery of terracotta figurines of the Sunga period at Mahasthan and Kushana coins in several places in Bihar, Bengal and Orissa gives us just a peep at the period intervening between the Maurya and Gupta rules. A number of epigraphic records and copper plates leaves no doubt that northern Bengal formed an integral part of Gupta Empire down to the end of the sixth century A. D. The religious atmosphere at this period was apparently one of tolerance, although it is clear that the Brahmanical and the Jaina faiths were more prevalent among the inhabitants of North Bengal than the religion of the Buddha. Hieun Tsang,





3. Seals

who visited this part of the country in the 2nd quarter of the 7th century A. D., also corroborates the view that Jaina and Brahmanical religions were more prosperous than Buddhism.

Prior to the establishment of Pala rule the country appears to have been in a state of anarchy, which is metaphorically described by the Tibetan historian Taranath as that of fishes, the strong preying on the weak. However, it is at this period North Bengal under the influence of king Sasanka made some abortive attempt to assert its individuality in the sphere of art and at the formation of a school of sculpture (as at Paharpur) between the middle of 7th and the third part of the 8th century A. D. The development in the sphere of art that had been fostered by centuries of peaceful and enlightened rule under the Guptas was thwarted considerably on account of the internal dissensions and the rivalries of local rulers as well as due to successive invasions of ambitious kings from far and near. In order to put an end to anarchy the people elected Gopala, a popular Chief as their ruler. The Pala dynasty formed by Gopala about the middle of the 8th century A. D. was one of the most remarkable of ancient Indian dynasties and its rule for nearly four and a half centuries established for the first time a long and stable government in Bengal. From the evidence of copper plate grants and pillar inscription we know not only the names of the kings, but also a great deal about their system of administration. The Palas exercised direct administrative control over Bengal, Bihar and Assam. Although the Palas were Buddhists there is evidence that Hinduism also enjoyed a



large measure of tolerance. It was during this period that many new Hindu temples were established in Bengal under royal patronage.

Besides the erection of several temples and Viharas in different parts of their empire the biggest and most important of these must have been the establishment at Paharpur which received royal patronage from the kings of the early Pala Empire. Under their rule the art was also not neglected. According to the Tibetan historian, Taranath, two great religious painters and sculptors, named Dhiman and Vitapala, flourished in Varendra, in the reign of Dharmapala and Devapala; and it is believed that some of the fine specimens of medieval sculpture found in Bengal are the work of those artists or of the schools established by them.

The glory and brilliance of the Pala empire did not last long. After the death of Devapala in the year 850 A. D. a steady process of decline and dis-integration was set in which reduced the Palas almost to an insignificant political power in North India. About the end of the 10th century A. D. the glory of the Pala empire was revived under Mahipala I. The prosperity of the establishment attained during this revival is reflected in a wholesome renovation in the main shrine and in the monastic cells where a number of ornamental pedestals seems to have been installed. This is also noticeable in the construction of numerous votive stupas at the shrine of Tara in the Satyapir Bhita mound.

Towards the middle of the 11th century A. D. the fortunes of the Pala dynasty again suffered a reverse and Bengal was overrun in turn by a series of foreign invasions from the east, west and the south. The Pala kingdom was shaken to its very foundation and gradually reduced to a very small power. It was at this period the incendiarism of the invading armies from East Bengal referred to in the Nalanda inscription must have occurred.

In the 12th century A. D. the Senas, who were originally a family of Southern India, replaced the Palas and Varendra became part of their dominions. The Sena kings do not seem to have had any special leaning towards Buddhism, and it does not appear to have received any patronage from them. The Buddhist institutions soon dis-appeared for want of royal support. As such the condition of the establishment of Paharpur further deteriorated and some make-shift arrangements were made for its renewal and reconstruction during this period.

With the withdrawal of royal patronage and eventual deser-



tion by its worshippers, this remarkable establishment gradually fell into continued neglect and ruin. The aggressive monsoon rain of the land and its consequent wild jungle growth combined with the destructive human agencies must have contributed to a large extent in accelerating its decay, which ultimately rendered the very access to the site increasingly difficult during the Mughal and early British rule.

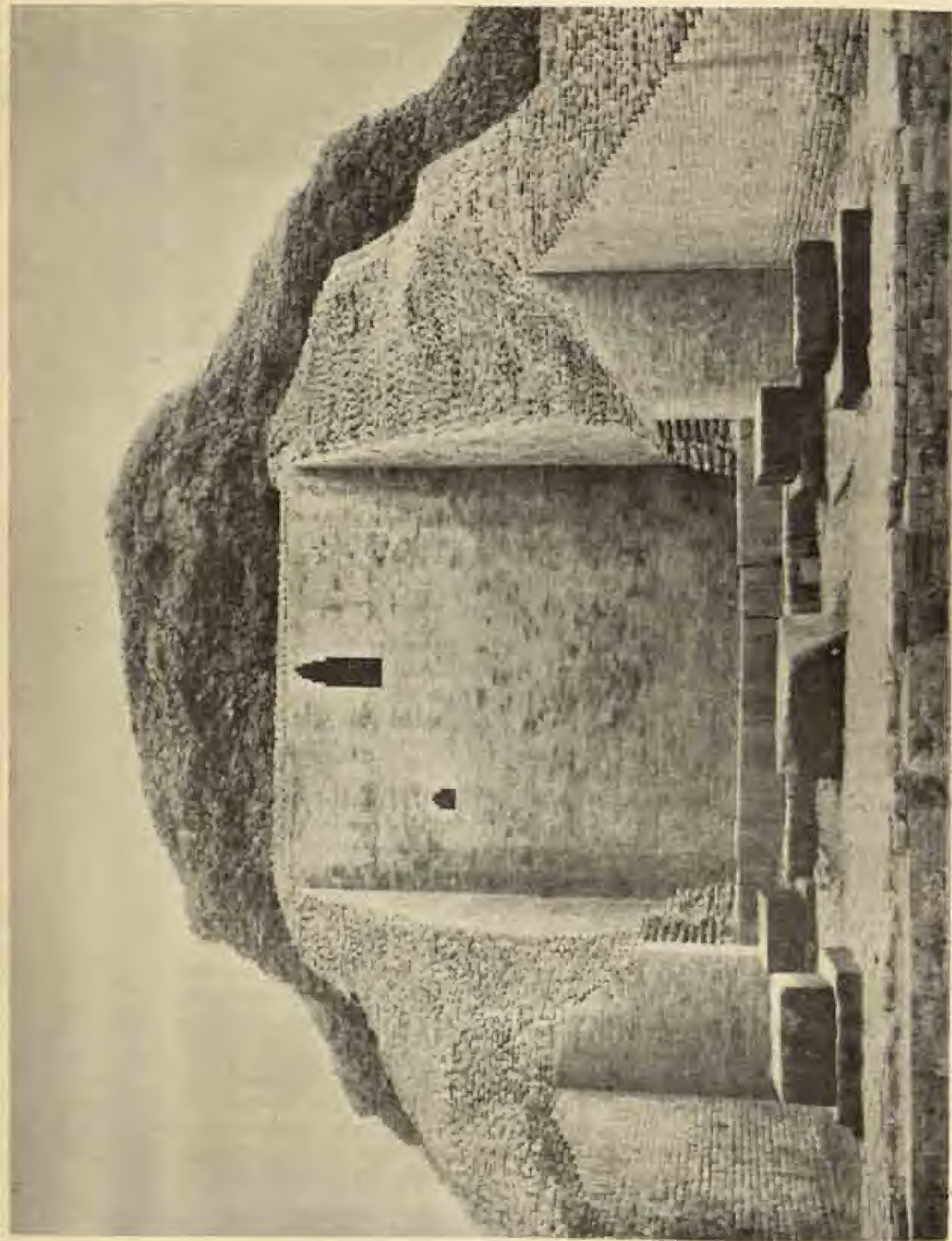
### III. THE MAIN TEMPLE

The utter scarcity of building remains, prior to the muslim occupation of this region makes it extremely difficult to offer any systematic study of architecture of that period. The peculiar climatic condition of Bengal with its aggressive monsoon, the nature of impermanent building material used in construction and the destructive human agencies are the main factors for the virtual obliteration of those religious and secular edifices reared up before the Muslim epoch. Those which survived are buried under their crumbling debris. Hieun Tsang's reference to monasteries and stupas erected by Asoka, yet remains to be archaeologically authenticated. The material remains of such structure, so far unearthed by archaeological excavations relate to very late period when the Viharas had developed into luxurious and well organized seats of learning.

The Stupa is a necessary adjunct to a monastery. The custom of raising a tumulus over the remains of some holy saint or to mark a certain sacred spot is a very ancient one, but it appears that the Buddhists utilized it extensively to enshrine relics of their Master or his chief disciple. Owing to its symbolically representing Buddha's Nirvana it is vested with a special place by the devotees. All the stupas, so far unearthed in East Pakistan are votive in character, except a series recently excavated at Mainamati (Kotila Mura, 1956). They are built on traditional style, a square ornated plinth surmounted by circular drum and hemispherical dome.

However, the greatest architectural attraction during the Pala period was the Somapuri Vihara (Paharpur), the extensive remains of which have been laid bare by systematic excavations. It is the biggest single vihara (measuring 922 feet North-South and 919 feet East-West, externally) so far known in the sub-Continent. This gigantic establishment with surrounding 177 monastic cells, gateways, votive stupas, minor chapels, tank and a multitude of other structures for the convenience of the inmates, is dominated by a central shrine, conspicuous by its lofty height





4. Main Temple—View of the Northern Hall.

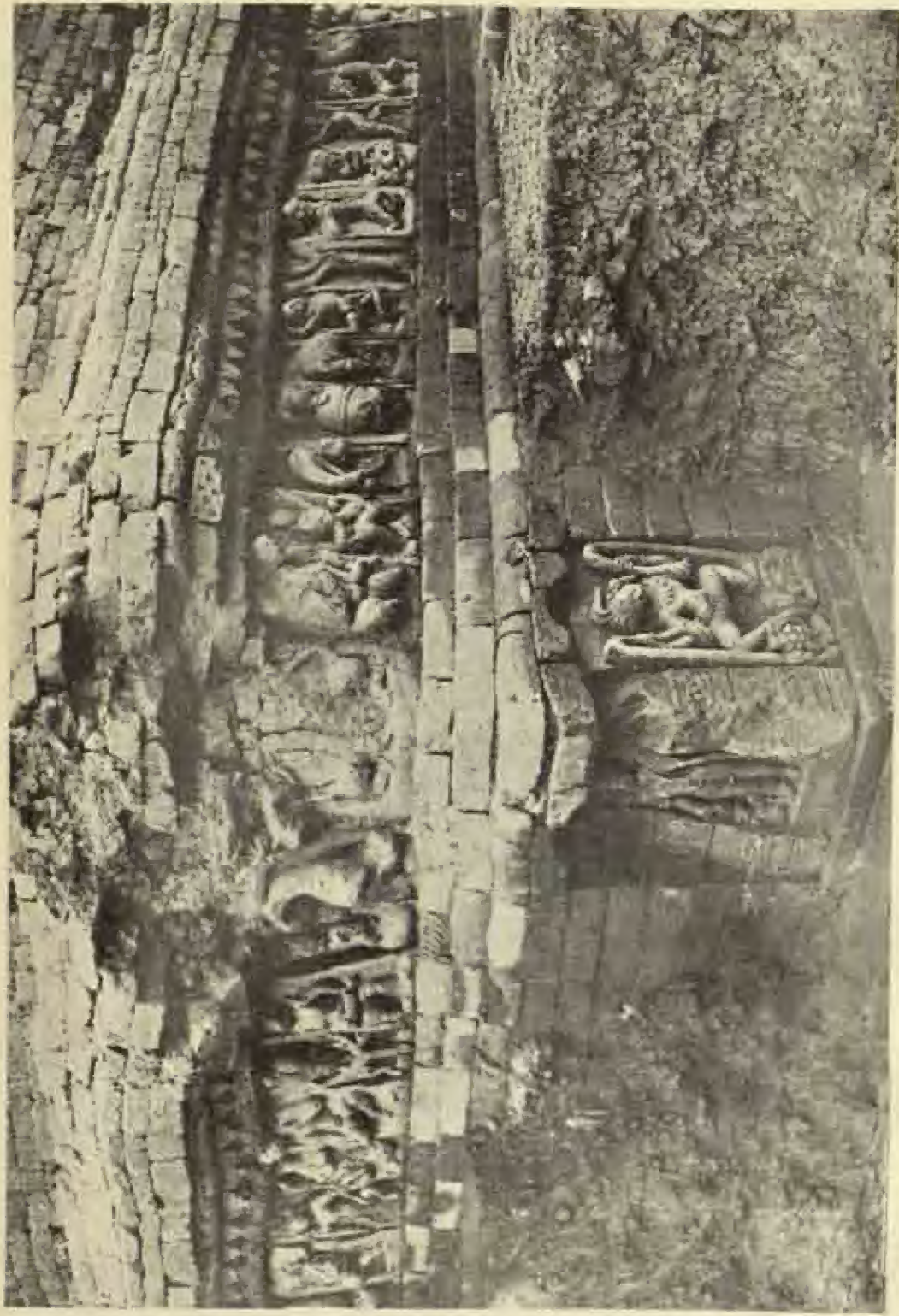


and architectural peculiarities. It is distinguished by its cruciform shape with angles of projection between the arms, its 3 raised terraces and complicated scheme of decoration of walls with carved brick cornices, friezes of terracotta plaques and stone relief. This type of temple architecture from East Pakistan, profoundly influenced the architectural efforts of South-East Asia—specially Burma, and Java. Recently, excavations on the Mainamati Range at Comilla have brought to light a similar picturesque establishment locally known as Salban Vihara, exhibiting similar architectural affinities. This single unit, although less ambitious in proportions, appears to be no less interesting.

When the monument is examined from the top downward, the complex plan of the structure appears to be very simple. A centrally placed hollow square right at the top of the terraces provides the moot point for the conception of the whole plan of the spectacular form and feature of this stupendous monument. It is quite probable that there might have been a four-faced (Chaturmukhas) temple of the Jains on the spot and in order to relieve monotony and to utilise the colossal structure to serve for their purpose, provision was made in the second as well as in the first terrace for a projection, consisting of an ante-chamber and a mandapa, on each face, leaving out a portion of the whole length of the square at each of the four corners. The circumambulatory passage with the parapet wall was made to run parallel to the outline of this plan. This arrangement resulted in a cruciform shape with one projecting angle between the arms of the cross. An enclosure wall strictly conforming to the basement plan, with only a slight deviation near the main stair-case, runs round the monument. There is ample evidence that this complete plan, from the basement to the top, along with different component elements, belonged to a single period of construction, but the later repairs, additions and alterations did not fundamentally affect the general arrangement and plan. The discovery at Lauriya Nandangarh in North Bihar appears to be an earlier prototype of the Paharpur temple, but in fact the angles here are purely decorative and have originated from an entirely different conception. Thereafter no further experiments in this direction were made in any structural plan in Indo-Pakistan sub-continent.

The scheme of embellishment of the basement walls of the main shrine is unique and artistic. The monotony of the plain surface of the wall which was laid in ashlar courses, was broken by the insertion of stone bas-reliefs at most angles of the projection and at intervals in specially built recesses in the middle of the wall. The intermediate niches, mostly fitted in with sculptures





5. Lower part of basement showing the position of stone sculptures.





of Brahmanical deities of the late Gupta epoch, appear to have been provided for in later times to accommodate sculptures, gathered from the earlier monument at the site or in the neighbourhood. Above the reliefs, there is a projecting cornice with a course of half-round moulding and two plain mouldings, above which is found a recess in which terracotta plaques are fixed in rows and run almost uninterruptedly throughout the length of the wall, parallel to the present ground level. Before the plain ashlar wall is resumed, a deep cornice moulding of 9 courses of various ornamental designs has been continued. Above this stand other recesses for the insertion of terracotta plaques which probably had another cornice moulding above, before the wall terminated. The plaques of the upper frieze have been preserved "in Situ" only at some of the corners of the angles. In other places they have fallen down together with the large portion of the cornice mouldings below. The same arrangement has been observed in the first terrace as well.

The walls of the temple were built of well-burnt bricks, laid in mud mortar, and considering the materials used, it is remarkable that after a lapse of so many centuries parts of it are still standing to a height of about 70 feet above the ground level. The plainness of the walls is relieved on the outer face by projecting cornices of ornamented bricks (twisted rope, stepped pyramid and lotus-petal pattern) and bands of terracotta plaques, set in recessed panels, which run in a single row all around the basement and in double rows around the circumambulatory passage in the upper terraces.

The arrangement of the structure at the lower terraces would appropriately suggest that the temple was capped by some sort of super-structure with elaborate covering or roof. The extreme mutilated condition of the monument at the top hardly allows us to follow Mr. Dikshit's suggestion that the main shrine of this colossal edifice was situated at the top and consisted of a square cella with a circumambulatory verandah all around. But there is no evidence that this hollow square pile has any access to its inner part from the ante-chambers. The paved platform inside does not appear to have served any function except to add to the solidity of the foundation of the lofty walls of the central square. Hence the arrangement of the temple, as it stands now, shows that the sanctuary could have neither been situated at the top nor inside the central square pile.

An elaborate drainage arrangement was provided in the entire area of the main temple. There were about 22 outlets at





6. The doorways of earlier rooms in verandah of rooms 120-122.



intervals by channels 1-6' wide through which the rain water flows from inside the temple compound to the open ground outside. The ends of the masonry drains from the north and east ante-chambers are marked by stone gargoyles still more or less preserved.

#### IV. THE MONASTERY

##### General Descriptions

In the earlier period the monasteries (Samgharama, Vihara) in Indo-Pakistan sub-continent were usually built of wood on a stylobate of stone or brick. As the monastic organisation developed they were designed as a square block formed by four rows of cells along the four sides of an inner courtyard. From a simple dwelling house for the monks, the monastery often ultimately came to be transformed into an important centre of learning, something in the form of a modern residential University. Ancient Bengal had also her monastic organisations and establishments but they have all perished.

The exposition of the biggest single Samgharama at Paharpur has helped us much in ascertaining the form and features of a monastery in ancient Bengal. The entire establishment, occupying a quadrangular court, measuring more than 900 feet externally on each side, has high enclosure walls about 16 feet in thickness and from 12 feet to 15 feet in height. The wallings, though not preserved to a very great height, envisage, from their thickness and massiveness, a storeyed structure, exactly commensurate with the terraced form of the main temple in the centre of the enclosure. In plan it consists of rows of cells each approximately 14-0 x 13-6' in area, all connected by a spacious verandah (approximately 8 feet to 9 feet wide) running continuously all around, and approached from the inner courtyard by flight of steps provided in the middle of each of the four sides. There being 45 cells on the north and 44 in each of the other three sides; the total number of rooms is 177 excluding the cells of the central block in each direction. The central block on the three sides is marked by a projection in the exterior wall and contains three cells and a passage around them, while in the north there stands a spacious hall. The most striking feature in the monastery is that as many as 92 rooms contain ornamental pedestals occupying the central position. The pedestals are generally associated with thick concrete floors and broad doorways. Originally the main purpose of these rooms was to accommodate the monks attached to the Vihara, but the presence of such a large number of pedestals



in rooms for worship or ceremonials remains obscure. It appears that these structures belong to the second period of the monastery, as no such arrangement was found in the original one as is clear from the excavation of the original floors of the rooms whenever it was possible.

Besides the main gateway to the north, access to the quadrangle might also be had by a subsidiary entrance through the northern enclosure near its eastern end. There is no arrangement of ingress on the southern and western sides, but possibly a small passage in the middle of the eastern block was provided for private entrance. The roof of the verandah seems to have been supported on pillars and there were probably railings, fencing off the verandah except at the approaches.

### Northern Area

As the main portal is situated in the middle of the northern enclosure, the area appears to be an important one. Before we enter the main hall of the gateway, we come across a number of structures outside the enclosure, one of which on the east probably served as a waiting hall or accommodated the guards of the establishment. Others, such as the two circular structures standing on a square base flanking the stair-case, were votive in character. On ascending the broad stair-case, built of the brick-on-edge over flat bricks, the main entrance hall of the gateway, measuring 50'-0" x 47'-0" is reached. The bases of thick pillars and their plasters show that the roof was supported on pillars. It may be observed in the east and west walls of the hall that a band of brick-on-edge at the height of 6'-9" from the stone bases was introduced in the masonry to relieve the monotony of the ashlar courses.

Before advancing towards the actual monastery building it may be seen that some cells are situated immediately to the east of the outer hall of the gateway. They were probably used as offices or strong rooms by the head or elder of the Mahavihara. The main passage to the cells was originally through room 2. The openings in the east as well as in the north wall of the room show a corbelled course on the top. The passage was filled up with debris, and it was during the removal of this debris that the richest hoard of loose antiquities was recovered. It consists of five copper coins, several iron pieces and fragments of copper utensils, 30 stone beads and over 35 inscribed terracotta sealings.

When we proceed from the outer to the inner hall we notice a stone step 2 feet by 5 inches and a stone threshold 7'-11" in length.



Grooves in the wall which are  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide and 6 inches deep indicate that the door leading to the outer hall was bolted behind by a wooden log. The bases of stone pillars and plasters and traces of concrete floors are quite clear in the inner hall which measures 37'-0" x 24'-0". It now leads us through the main verandah to a ruined flight of steps directing to the courtyard exactly in front of the main temple. The passage from the main gate to the enclosure around the main temple is at present occupied by a deep pool. Excepting a stretch of concrete flooring which is visible between the southern edge of the pool and the enclosure wall of the main temple, no trace of any brick or concrete floor could be discovered. The old passage which led towards the main temple from the main gate has become totally extinct.

Turning to the actual monastery building we find that by placing a special block in the middle, each of the four sides is divided into two parts. Thus in the middle of the northern side of the monastery the cells are flanked into western and eastern wings. In the western wing the traces of pedestals or their bases are found in practically every room. In rooms 165 to 176 the ante-rooms of the cells are well preserved, and the stepping stones, which give access to them, are intact in rooms 169 to 173. Owing to rearrangement of walls, the size of the rooms 175 and 176 is unusually small and the complex of rooms behind them is not quite clear. In the eastern wing of the northern monastery there are 9 rooms where the existence of masonry pedestals in stone or brick has been found. Excepting three stone pillar bases of the latest period in front of rooms 4 to 6 and six rectangular brick pillars of the earlier period in front of rooms 12 to 15, no structure of importance could be unearthed in this part of the monastery building. Beyond room 15 towards east there appears to have been originally a postern gate provided with the only other entrance to the monastery.

### **Adjoining Courtyard**

The adjoining courtyard of the western wing appears to have contained some important and well-preserved structures enclosed within a regular brick wall, which runs from the verandah against room 162 to 174. There are rectangular weep-holes at regular intervals through the enclosure wall, so that the water may flow from inside the enclosure. The most important structure within this area is a square brick structure in which the lower part consists of three channels separated by wallings and closed on the top by corbelled brick work. It is not quite clear what the purpose of the corbelled channels was. Further west, beyond





7. (a) *Bronze image of Ganesa*

this enclosure wall, there is a big well with a paved platform around, being one of the best masonry wells in the compound. In the courtyard of the eastern wing there are irregular cells of the later period but they do not appear to have any value either in the structure or the finds.

### Finds

The most important finds made in the western wing of this part of the monastery are bronze images of Ganesa found in the court in front of room 159 and a bronze Jaina image found in front of room 170. While, in the eastern wing, in room 7, a fragment of the back-ground of an image (Prabhavali) of considerable size ascribed to be associated with the Mahayana Buddhist creed was found. In room 23, a number of jars was discovered on the floor for the storage of grains and other necessities. Besides this a few finds of cornelian and agate beads are also recorded along with the usual terracotta objects and pottery.

### Eastern Area

The eastern side of the monastery is also divided into the northern and the southern wings as the central block is situated in the middle. The rooms particularly at the northern and southern extremities have been much damaged owing to the ravages of the brick-hunters. The central rooms are, however, in a better state of preservation. As the temple of Tara is located at the Satyapir Bhita which is situated to the east of the main establishment, while the main entrance is on the north, it is quite possible that originally there might have been a subsidiary or private means of admittance and exit for the monks on the east near the central block, in order to facilitate their visits to the aforesaid temple. Of the 44 rooms on the eastern side at least 24 show the existence of masonry pedestals in stone or brick in them, which are usually 6 feet to 8 feet in length and 4 feet 6 inches or more in breadth. In the elevation and formation, some of the pedestals show



considerable diversity, those in rooms 29, 37, 44, 46 being noteworthy in this connection.

### Adjoining Courtyard

On the eastern side of this Mahavihara some of the principal structures have been found in the court adjoining the cells, south of the central block. The noteworthy among them is a miniature model of the central shrine. In this model the plan of the main temple is perfected and made more symmetrical. Another important structure is a flight of stairs 11 feet by 6 inches in width projecting for a distance of 32 feet towards the courtyard of the frontage of the central block in the eastern side. The last 6 steps are covered by stone blocks. The head of the steps is 1 foot 6 inches wide and the rise about 7 inches in height. Owing to constant use signs of depressions are found in the middle of each of the stones forming the last step.

### Finds

Almost all the antiquities, unearthed in the eastern monastery, are of a secular character. But the discoveries of a standing bronze image of Buddha in abhaya mudra and seated Kubera (Jambhala) indicate the religious practice prevalent at that time. Besides these a number of well-preserved terracotta drinking cups and bell-shaped pottery vases were also found.

### Southern Area

Having the central block in the middle, 44 rooms in the southern monastery are also flanked into eastern and western wings. At least half of these rooms are furnished with ornamental pedestals. In the eastern extremity of the southern row of cells there is a landing 11' x 0-6" wide, against the exterior face of the wall, where a heap of broken pottery, several feet in depth, has been found which indicates that the rubbish from the monastery was probably accumulated here. In the ornamentation of the pedestal in room 88 we find some knobs at the corners below the courses of half-round bricks as we have seen in the miniature model of the main temple. The verandah in front of rooms 75 to 79 appears



7. (b) *Jaina figure in bronze*



to have undergone reconstruction in successive periods. There are weep-holes in the verandah and buttress walls between room 87 and 88, but none of the connections for draining the level of the cells and verandah has been found to carry out water outside the compound. The structures in the central block of the southern side are similar to those on the east and west, but the outlines of the side rooms can hardly be made out as they were in a very bad state of preservation. The masonry of the landing and stairway is in a fragmentary condition. Besides containing a number of ornamental pedestals, the western wing has no important cells in this part of the monastery. But in room 96 the cross sections of the wall and floor can be seen distinctly. At this point the floor level of the first monastery is about 5 feet from surface, that of the second 3 feet, while the uppermost is within a foot from the ground level. In the verandah the difference between the two successive floors is only a foot. The foundations of the rooms go down to a depth of over 8 feet below the original floor.

### **Adjoining Courtyard**

In the south-eastern part of the courtyard near rooms 73 and 74 there are five shrines of varied shapes with a highly ornamented super-structure and a plan with a number of projections in which bold torus and deep cornice mouldings are prominent. The most interesting in this group is a structure showing the shape of a 16 sided star. All the shrines are enclosed within a compound wall. To its north there is a big well with the internal diameter of 8'-3". By laying some masonry in a herringbone pattern its monotony has been much relieved. The kitchen and the long hall of the refectory (bhojanasala) of the Mahavihara are also situated in this area. The side walls of the long hall have been exposed to a length of over 120 feet. It appears from the heaps of charcoal and ashes found inside this structure that it was roofed by timber. The existence of three pairs of brick piers above the floor shows that the roof was supported on them. A masonry drain in between the refectory and the kitchen has been traced to a length of over 150 feet northward. To its west there are three large wells in a row which probably used to serve both the above establishments. To its west a large building that extends from east to west is the cooking establishment of the Vihara. Inside the building there is a narrow corridor all around a large hall, but exact purpose of the presence of a number of stones arranged in rows near the corridor could not be made out. Excepting two plain square brick stupas and two ring-wells no structures of importance could be unearthed in the south-western courtyard. The top of the well has been strengthened by a brick-on-edge platform.





8. *Votive stupas in the eastern courtyard; in left foreground stupa with large votive deposit.*

### **Finds**

Although very few antiquities were recovered from this part of the monastery, but the discovery of an inscribed stone pillar had led to the commencement of excavations in the south-western part of the monastery. The inscription records the installation of the pillar by one Dasabalagarbha for the satisfaction of the three Jewels. It appears that the pillar was brought from one of the halls of the central temple and utilised as a door-sill in one of



the cells, because it has no place in the astylar construction of the monastery.

### **Western Area**

The western part of the monastery has the same plan of formation as we have found in other three sides. It is noteworthy that some of the walls of the rooms have been preserved to a height of 6 feet above the floor level. In the southern wing there are ten ornamental pedestals, while in the northern there are 12 including some of the best and most elaborate specimens particularly in the cells 149 to 154. A series of five parallel walls, which were erected to serve as the foundation of the landing in the central block of the western side have sunk and present a curious wavy appearance owing to the unequal sinking. The interior wall of the projection towards the courtyard has been decorated with terracotta plaques and a stone gargoyle. There are ornamental pedestals both in the central and the side rooms of the central block. The landing and flight of stairs which led to the main temple are placed on a platform with projecting planes towards the courtyard. The earlier steps are of brick-on-edge with a concrete layer which has been superseded by a brick-built stairway of the later period. Fortunately the cells on the western side are in a better state of preservation, so we can form a clear idea as to the nature of the cells and the different periods in which they underwent repair. The nature of the back rooms can be visualised in rooms 133 to 137. The difference in the size of the original rooms of the earliest as well as of the second period along with their respective splayed door-jambs can be seen in rooms 136, 137, 149 and 151. In the northern side of this wing the most elaborate ornamentations have been made in the basement of pedestals. The use of iron clamps jointed to stones of the pedestals is also noticeable in rooms 46 and 145. In room 138 there are large mortice holes at the four corners of the pedestal and two in front projection. Probably they were meant for fixing some kind of canopy during important functions. In rooms 138, 149, 153 and 161, the pedestals made of brick are noteworthy. The verandah at the north-west corner shows the bases of pillars opposite to rooms 153 and 154.

### **Adjoining Courtyard**

Excepting a decayed landing and flight of stairs no structures of importance could be unearthed in the courtyard adjacent to the western side. It appears that this part of the quadrangle



was not utilised in the same manner as was found in other sides of the Vihara. So the rooms and floors of the cells on this side are comparatively in a better state of preservation.

### **Finds**

Of the finds discovered in this area the following objects deserve to be mentioned. In room 122 two jars at the intermediate floor level were discovered (at a depth of 4'-6"), while in one of the jars a steatite image of Manjusri seated in Rajalila to be ascribed to the 10th century was found at a depth of 5'-6". In the circumambulating passage in the central block a jar with a lid was also discovered at the level of the floor of the later period. In it there were about 3½ seers of cowries, some in good and others in a bad state of preservation. Almost complete absence of any coins of the Pala period (8th to 12th century A. D.) in Bengal indicates that these cowries shells were in vogue as common currency in the daily transaction of the people. Hence the monks had provided themselves amply with this humble currency. But the most important discovery of a beautiful bronze image representing Hara-Gauri or Uma-Mahesvara (height 5½") was made in the courtyard adjacent to gargoyle. A hoard of the Islamic coins in a small pottery cup was also discovered almost at the surface in the verandah of room 125.

### **V. STRUCTURES OUTSIDE THE MONASTERY AREA. OPEN PLATFORM.**

One of the most interesting structures is situated at a distance of 89 feet from the outer wall of the southern monastery. It is an open platform 105'-0" x 27'-0" running parallel to the monastery. It stands about 10 feet above the adjoining ground level and is not accessible from any other side except a raised pathway across room 102. This gangway is 16'-6" in width, being made up of two walls, 6'-0" and 5'-6" in breadth respectively, separated by a gap of 5 feet which was composed of a filling of brick and debris. In between the gangway and the wall of the monastery there is a vaulted passage running parallel to the wall for the free passage of people outside the enclosure from one side to another. Its bottom is provided with a concrete floor which is 2'-6" below the present ground level. The entire southern face of the platform is marked with a series of water-chutes, each 1 foot in width and 4'-3" in length occurring at interval of 4 feet to 4 feet and 3 inches. The channels are provided with fine jointed brickwork. Some of these were subsequently blocked up and new channels were built on the top. Though it is uneven now the floor was provided



with concrete and some traces of it were found here and there at the top of the platform. It is difficult to follow the suggestion of Mr. Dikshit that the platform was used for the purpose of ablution only. The existence of a tank in between northern gate and the main temple from the very beginning shows that the purpose of ablution was easily met by the inhabitants of the monastery. The tank at present has turned into a small pool and its importance has been much decreased. Yet it is suggested that only the northern half of such large platform was used for the purpose of ablution as traces of party-walls dividing it into compartments are noticeable in this side of the platform. But the type of water-chutes constructed at regular intervals on the southern portions of the platform indicates that the main purpose was to use them as latrines in order to facilitate the smooth passage of the night soils as well as water, otherwise gargoyles or ordinary channels would have been used. Moreover the existence of a sloping pavement of finely-laid bricks along the entire length of the platform has convinced us that it was used for the purpose of both ablution and latrine. The pavement was also connected with an old bed of stream in the neighbourhood, as there is a deposit of sand almost everywhere around the Paharpur settlement for over a mile.

### **Bathing Ghat**

There is a bathing ghat at a distance of 160 feet from the outer wall of the monastery towards the south-eastern corner of the Vihara. It is not parallel to the south wall of the monastery but is slightly inclined towards the north. On either side of it there is a parallel wall paved with brick-on-edge and concrete. The head of the ghat is laid with huge stone blocks along with brick-work 12 feet in length. It descends to a gradual slope of 41 feet where occurs a band of lime stone slabs. The bed of the ghat is also covered with sand which shows the existence of a stream close-by. A tradition in relation to the ghat is still existing among the local people that Sandhyavati, the daughter of a king named Mahidalan, used to bathe at the ghat every day and also she is supposed to be the mother of Satyapir through immaculate conception.

### **The Temple of Gandesvari**

To the south-west of the ghat an isolated structure called locally 'the Temple of Gandesvari' is situated at a distance of about 40 feet. The lotus medallion and bricks with floral pattern used in the front wall as also the mortar used between the joints of





9. Masonry Ghat to the south-east of the Monastery.



10. Stone image of Bodhisattva Padmapani.



bricks are sufficient indications that this building was erected during the Muslim period. It is a rectangular hall measuring 22'0" x 11'6" with an octagonal brick pillar base in the centre. There is a projection in the middle of the western wall which contains a small room about 4'9" square. It was used as shrine and the four small niches on the side walls held other objects of worship. In front of the door there is a circular platform 24 feet in diameter with a brick-on-edge floor, but its shape is quite unorthodox and dissimilar to earlier structure for similar purposes.

## VI. STONE SCULPTURES

Undoubtedly the discovery of numerous stone relief at the stupendous shrine of Paharpur has made its position unique in Bengal. There are as many as sixty three stone sculptures in alto-relievo all around the basement wall of the main temple. All the images represent Brahmanical faith excepting the only Buddhist image of Padmapani, which is fixed in the middle of the south side of the basement wall. It appears rather strange that such a vast number of Brahmanical deities were installed in this grand religious establishment of the Buddhists. It may be noted here that similar sculptures representing Brahmanical gods are very common in Nalanda. But the occurrence of professedly Brahmanical sculpture in a Buddhist Temple indicates that they were gathered from the earlier monuments at the site or in the neighbourhood and fixed up in the niches of the main temple for its embellishment. Although the main fabric of the temple belongs to a single period of construction, but the presence of not a few sculptures of definitely late Gupta style led scholars to think that they belong to different periods. Despite this difference of opinion one cannot but distinguish in these sculptures, three distinct groups with marked difference in style and artistic excellence.

In the first group a considerable number of sculptures depict scenes from the life of Krishna. There are some other panels which depict the most popular themes of the Mahabharata and Ramayana and various other incidents from daily life of the humble village folk. The people that take part in these scenes, wear plain and scanty clothes and do not show any trace of refined sensitiveness or cultured sophistication. Their features and appearances are heavy and sometimes crude, without any proportion or definition of form. Though the art is technically crude and imperfect, but its social content is intensely human, highly expressive of liveliness and artistically significant. Despite a general heaviness all through in the sculptures of the second group, there are some panels which are marked by lively action and movement.



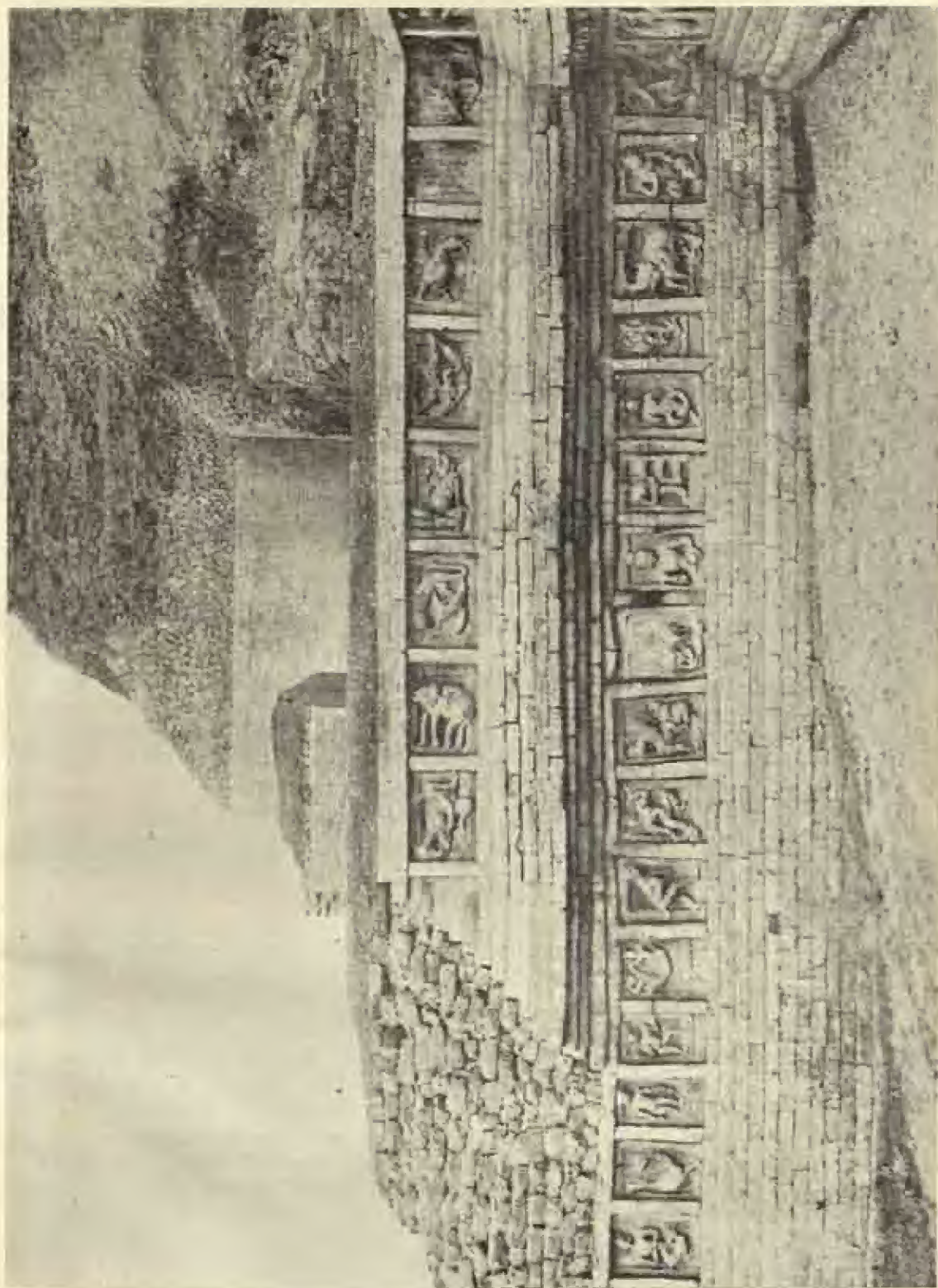
Thus it is a compromise between the first and third group which maintains the eastern Gupta traditions. It is in the third group that we find the soft and tender modelling, the refinement and the delicacy of features which are generally associated with Gupta classicism. Further it has been observed that there is a gulf of difference in attitude, subject matter, temperament and general technique between the first group and the other two groups. The sculptures of the other two groups generally depict cult divinities conforming to the dictates of the Brahmanical hierarchy. Artistically their attitude is much sophisticated and they try to achieve a standard of dignity, grace and refinement which are definite characteristics of a people of higher breed and of the upper classes of society. The stones used in them are greyish, white, spotted sandstone or basalt. Of all the loose stone images found in the excavations the most interesting is the fragmentary image of Hevajra in close embrace with his Sakti or female counter-part.

Besides these sculptures some household stone objects like grinding mills, mortars and pestles and curry stones have been discovered.

## VII. TERRACOTTA PLAQUES

The terracotta plaques of this great Vihara play the most predominant part in the scheme of decoration of the walls of the temple. There are above 2,000 that still decorate the faces of the walls and about 800 have been picked up loose from the site. The alluvial plains of the Indus and the Ganges are ideally suited for this plastic art which led the common folk to utilise them fully for the manufacture of cheap artifacts for domestic use and decorative purpose. But the richness, variety and exuberance of the material from Paharpur are unrivalled. It is evident that the terracotta art must have existed in Eastern Pakistan in the earlier period as well, but it is at Paharpur that it could assert itself against the hieratic art of the earlier periods and of the upper classes, and it must be dated not later than the last half of the 8th century A.D., as the majority of these plaques are contemporaneous with the building of the monument itself. No regular sequential arrangement has been followed in fixing these plaques on the walls. It seems that the material fresh from the Kiln was brought to the site and fixed in the wall by the builder. The sizes of these plaques vary in different section of the walls. Some are unusually big, measuring 16' x 12' x 2½' and some are manufactured in a special size about 6 inches square, but most of them are of a standard height measuring 1-2' and 8' to 8½' in breadth.





11. Main Temple—View of walls of first terrace verandah from north-west showing position of plaques.



The representations of divinities of hierarchical religion are few and far between. The Brahmanical as well as the Buddhist gods are equally illustrated in the plaques. It appears that no attempt has been made to set apart any place for either of them, excepting the only figure of Buddha seated in the earth touching attitude in a somewhat conspicuous position of the basement wall on the east. Besides the principal varieties of the representations of Siva, other Brahmanical gods like Brahma, Vishnu, Ganesh and Surya are also found at Paharpur. Buddhist deities, mostly of the Mahayana School of Buddhism, including Bodhisattva Padmapani, Manjusri and Tara also appear here and there. Well-known stories from the panchatantra are represented with evident humour and picturesque expressiveness.

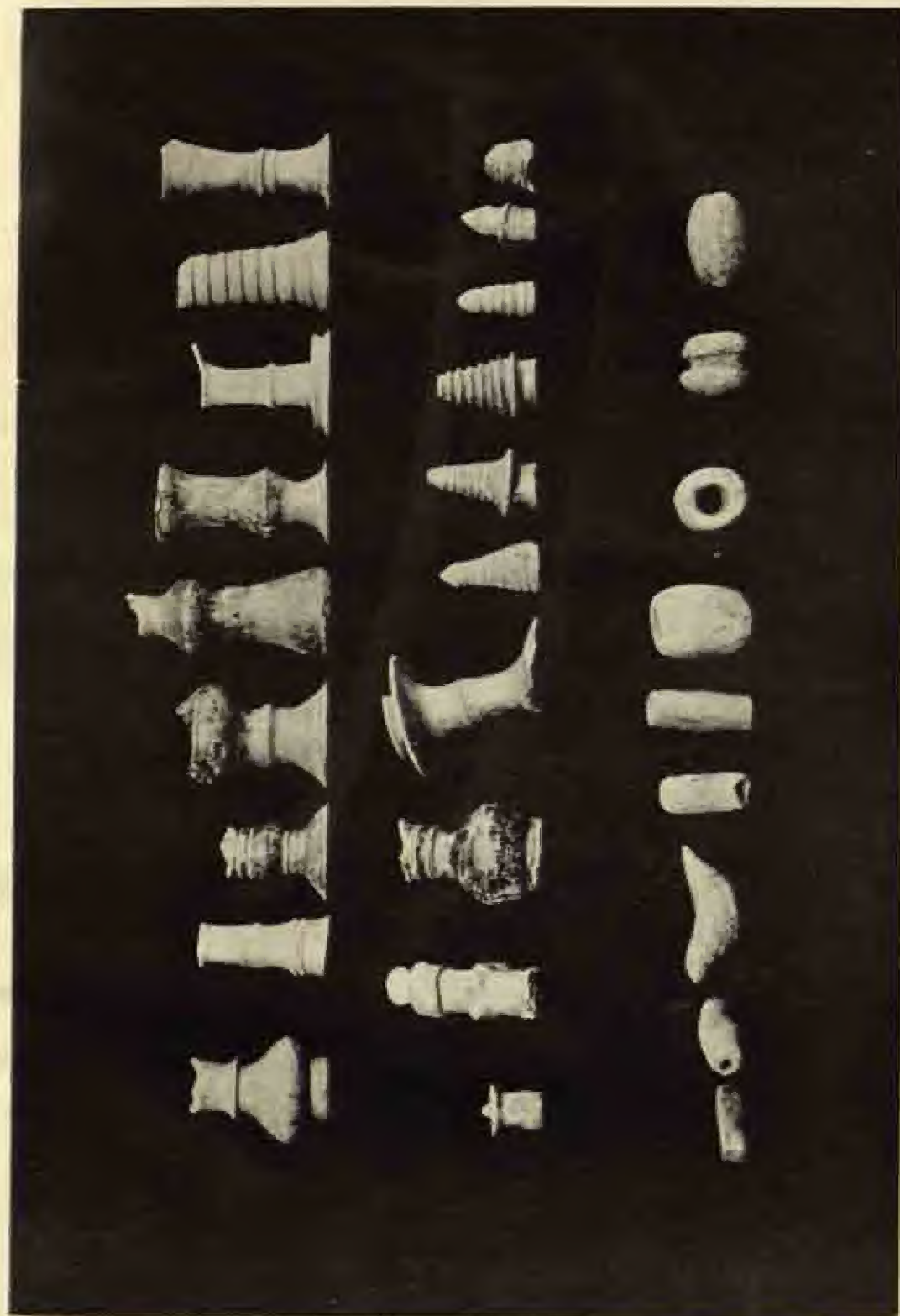
The fancy and imagination of the terracotta artists at Paharpur seem to revel mostly in the various movements of men and women engaged in different occupation. The artists were fully responsive to their environment and every conceivable subject of ordinary human life finds its place on the plaques. Similarly we also find the entire animal world in their typical actions and movements. But the representations of the flora are comparatively poor. The lotus and the common plantain tree are the only objects that form a large majority which figured in the plaques. It appears that this art of the people must have been very popular in Bengal. Although the artists cannot lay claim to any technical perfection, but no one can deny that they had a very keen observation of nature in its widest sense. These plaques give us a true insight into the real social life of the people in those days. Thus we can visualise through them how the common people lived their lives away from the courts and aristocratic environments.

## VIII. MINOR ANTIQUITIES

### Pottery

Of all the minor antiquities that have been recovered from the excavations, the pottery at Paharpur was numerous and varied. Most of them belong to the middle or the late period roughly from the end of the tenth to the twelfth century A.D., but it is very strange that no complete vessel could be discovered from the earliest strata. Generally the pottery is well burnt to a red or buff green on which red slip was applied either in bands or on the entire surface except at the bottom. Almost all vessels had a broad base and a protuberant centre while the large storage jars had a pointed or tapering bottom. Besides a number of vessels





12. Pottery, terracotta toys and other objects.

shaped like modern handies and spouted vases or lotas there are also vessels with a narrow neck and mouth with a cylindrical body. A number of lids of pottery, dishes, saucers and lamps which include a large variety of circular shell vessels with or without a lip at the rim near the wick have been found. But the large quantity of broken pottery used in fillings of a later period indicates that this material was available in large quantities. Despite this the pottery is not so varied as it would have been in the case of a city site and therefore it has not yet been possible to get a proper corpus of the pottery of Bengal.

Other common antiquities are the terracotta crude female figures, the model of animals, parts of finials, dabbers of truncated cone shape, flat discs, sealings and beads of cylindrical shape. A number of ornamental bricks have been found in the pattern of the stepped pyramid, lotus petal, the chess board, rectangular medallion with half lotuses etc.

### **Stucco**

A few finds of stucco heads have also been recovered from Paharpur, but this art was not developed much as it has been found in the Gandhara period. The common feature of all the Buddha heads is the protruding eye-lids and in some of them the hair is shown in ringlets.

### **Metal images**

Paharpur has failed miserably in producing any significant specimen of the art of metal images as compared with those found at Nalanda and in other districts of Bengal. The ornamental image of Hara-Gouri, the only Buddha image in bronze, a standing naked Jaina and the bronze figures of Kubera and Ganesh are the only important images that have been discovered at Paharpur.

### **Inscriptions**

The discovery of the inscribed copper-plate and some stone inscriptions has helped us much to know the chronology of the different periods. The copper-plate found in the north-east corner of the monastery is dated 159 Gupta Era. It records the purchase and grant by a Brahman couple of a piece of land for the maintenance of the worship of Arhats and a resting place at the Vihara, presided over by the Jaina teacher Guhanandin. This Vihara, which was situated at Vatagohali in the 5th century A.D.,





13. Ornamental bricks.

must have been an establishment of local celebrity. The village of Vatagohali was situated in the Mandala (Sub-division) of Nagiratha which covered a large area in the north-east of Rajshahi district. The Guhanandi Vihara at Vatagohali must have shared the fate of other Jaina establishments in the city of Pundravardhana, when anarchy reigned supreme in Bengal in the 7th century A.D. At last peace was established and the Pala empire was securely founded in Bengal in the 8th century A.D. and a magnificent temple along with a gigantic monastery was established by one of its emperor at Somapura. The monks in the new Buddhist Vihara may have obtained the royal permission to appropriate the land belonging to the Jaina Vihara and kept the original charter in their possession.

In the course of excavation a number of stone pillar inscriptions were discovered in the Paharpur establishment. These inscriptions contain the records of the donation of pillars referring to either Buddha or the three jewels. The dates assigned to them belong to 10th and 12th century A.D. It is interesting to see that all the donors have names ending in garbha, viz., Ajayagarbha, Srigarbha and Dasabalagarbha, excepting one which shows a fragmentary record of some person whose name ended in nandin. It is possible that these indicate one continuity or succession of monks who were at Paharpur Vihara.

## IX. SATYAPIR BHITA

The Bhita is situated at a distance of about 400 yards to the east of the monastery at Paharpur. The present name of Satyapir Bhita is stated to have originated not earlier than the 16th or 17th century A.D., when the local people were gradually converted to Islam. The Bhita originally contained the remains of the temple of Tara. Its identity has been established by the discovery of a number of circular terracotta plaques with a figure of an eight handed goddess and inscribed with the Buddhist creed in different places in the courtyard of the temple. This figure represents one of the forms of Tara, possibly Sitatapatra.

There appears to be an enclosure wall around the whole group of monuments excepting the north, where it could not be traced out. The site looks like trapezoidal in shape, as the length is about 250 to 300 feet and the width 140 to 187 feet. The approach to the whole area and also to the main temple was on the south.

The outstanding structure in the compound is the main temple, 48 feet in width and 80 feet in length. It is oblong and





*Terracotta Plaque. Gandharva*

consisted of two main parts viz., the sanctum in the northern portion and a pillared hall on the south around which there is the circumambulatory path. The internal arrangements of the hall are not quite clear. The floor of the older structure is still intact.

There are about 132 votive shrines in the compound of the temple. The existence of such a vast number of votive structures of various sizes, designs and ornamentations around the temple testifies its fame and sanctity. Of all the stupas discovered in the compound, an ornamental square stupa in the south-eastern corner, measuring 10-3' on each side, is lying in a conspicuous position near the main temple. In this stupa a relic chamber, measuring 3'-6" square, has been found, in which miniature votive clay stupas numbering several thousands were deposited. It appears that the pilgrims when visiting the Tara temple must have solemnly offered these miniature tokens of their reverence and deposited them in the stupa.

The principal antiquities discovered at the Satyapir Bhita are plaques, carved bricks and a quantity of crystal beads. In addition to these, about 50 Tara plaques and a bronze statuette of Jambhala have also been recovered from the site.











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